

THE FACTORY CREW OF SOUTHEAST L.A.:

the factory off of Santa Fe Ave. was
best.
we packed these heavy fixtures into
long boxes
then flipped them up into stacks
six high.
then the two loaders would
come by
clear your table and
you'd go for the next six.

ten hour day
four on Saturday
the pay was union
pretty good for unskilled labor
and if you didn't come in
with muscles
you got them soon enough

most of us in
white t-shirts and jeans
cigarettes dangling
sneaking beers
management looking
the other way

not many whites
the whites didn't last:
lousy workers

mostly Mexicans and
blacks
cool and mean

now and then
a blade flashed
or somebody got
punched out

management looking
the other way

the few whites who lasted
were crazy

the work got done
and the young Mexican girls
kept us
cheerful and hoping
their eyes flashing
small messages
from the
assembly line.

I was one of the
crazy whites
who lasted
I was a good worker
just for the rhythm of it
just for the hell of it

and after ten hours
of heavy labor
after exchanging insults
living through skirmishes
of those not cool enough to
abide
we left
still fresh

we climbed into our old
automobiles to
go to our places
to get drunk half the night
to fight with our women

to return the next morning
to punch in
knowing we were being
suckers
making the rich
richer

we swaggered in
in our white t-shirts and
jeans
gliding past
the young Mexican girls

we were mean and perfect
for what we were

hungover
we could
very damn well
do the job

but
it didn't touch us
ever

those tin walls

the sound of drills and
cutting blades

the sparks

we were some gang
in that death ballet

we were magnificent

we gave them
better than they asked

yet

we gave them
nothing.

DEAR PAW AND MA

my father liked Edgar Allen
Poe
and my mother liked The
Saturday Evening Post
and she died first
the priest waving a smoking
stick above her
casket
and my father followed
a year or so later
and in that purple velvet
his face looked like ice
painted yellow.

my father never liked
what I wrote: "people
don't want to read this
sort of thing."

"yes, henry," said my
mother, "people like to
read things that make
them happy."

they were my earliest
literary critics
and
they were both
right.

— Charles Bukowski
San Pedro CA